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RENEE GLADMAN

ANA PATOVA CROSSES A BRIDGE

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for Danielle Vogel, as we travel

"It is when you are asking about something that you realize you yourself have survived it, and so you must carry it, or fashion it into a thing that carries itself." (Anne Carson)

But, if you have not survived the thing you are thinking, because it won't end, then what are you writing?

ENCLOSURES

Ana Patova

I wrote this book in a circular home on a hill, overlooking the city, which roams while we are sleeping; I wrote it in a café with my friends; I wrote it as I looked for hidden streets, while sitting in desolate and lush spaces. I wanted to say language leaves a trace, makes a simultaneous trail, of us and of the crisis. My walking leaves a trace, also my saying I have walked. And, this is important, because, though these marks do not render precisely the picture of our crisis, they do show where there are still people. The day fills up with monuments, and the book attempts to erect a fence around them. The book wishes to end a crisis by the sheer fact of existing. But, rather than a History, the book becomes an index. It shuffles our bewilderment. It does not tell our story. It cannot do that. Nevertheless, it opens toward you. *Tij.*

—Ana Patova
Ravicka

MEANWHILE, THE EYE witnesses the story of what we were when we happened, when the last person left and the first person returned as if the same moment, as if the inhale began in the exhale, that first person leaving, who belonged to all of us, and what we became in his leaving: our reaching for our cups. We were holding space and making space through stillness, looking for structures to reflect what we were seeing, which was nothing. I wrote about buildings, and for the first part of the crisis this kept me occupied. I was holed up in my home. I slept on the books I wrote, which I'd glued between boards and given unassuming titles, like *Slow* and *Tired*, but these books were my life's work; I knew once I'd finished them I would never write again; rather, I would not need to write or live or sleep, it felt like. When I changed my mind about this, when I

changed my mind—but, it was me and it was L. and it was Z. and B., and we were all high on coffee, and sometimes pills, waiting for some storm to come, some document from abroad.

MORNINGS IN CIT Ramtala went like this when I was writing. Architecture was amazing, it talked to me, even up on that mountain. I lived with it as a consequence of language, so soon began to say that things architected other things, which I'd demonstrate to the group by saying, "it architectures," and wouldn't make it any more complicated than this. L. loved to hear words repurposed. She would glow like light inside a stone, so extraordinary it was (to see her face) that I began repurposing all kinds of words. But, the mornings were like this. I woke in darkness, as I had gone to sleep, I woke with language in my mouth. Yet, these weren't words that immediately became text. I had to perform, first, the *pareis* of writing, the *pareis* to come out of sleep. I slept deep in a moving geometry. I don't mean that my room was shaped this way, my room was ordinary, though also

beautiful. What I slept in was created by my mind; it was a question of void space, my sleeping. It began as empty, black space then was transformed by light, by ribboning, by the secreted presence of another. Another person touched my sleep and shapes formed. I knew who she was; I called her name. She could not come in body. So there was this sleeping geometric holding feeling, and there was outside architecture. I wrote a book wherein I brought sleep to the outside. I drank dream tea and sat on benches perched above the city, and in the blur wrote that book.

I WROTE A book whose title I withheld from the book for a long time as I wrote it and slept on it and not because I didn't want the book to know itself (I had no influence on that), rather, because I feared that once I put the two together they would go on without me. They would talk to each other, but wouldn't talk to me. The book would say it needed something of a difficult nature and the title would move about in the world until it found that thing. The title would place the difficult thing in the book, and then they would move on, again, without me. I needed to be in sync with the language coming out of my hands. I couldn't just sit there as its spectator. The crisis made you watch it, and didn't let you agitate against it, and didn't show you any visible damage, yet drove everyone away. I wrote a book at a glass table and wouldn't tell it its name, and

the book went on writing, because it was interested in what it did. It liked going out in a kind of spiral, returning to me brambled and dusty, as if it had been rolling on the floor.

THE CRISIS CAME out of its originary moment making numerous, slow, overlapping circles around the city until every building and every inhabitant was floundering in its enclosure. The crisis wore a T-shirt to the market and handed out flyers about climate change and asbestos; the crisis put bugs in your bed; it added periods to your sentences, so that you spoke plain and without invention. The crisis took words out of my books and strung them together, put them in envelopes, and mailed them to my friends, appalling them with obscenities and abstraction. The crisis made me give up architecture, drawing up plans for building, and sat me roughly in this chair from which I did not leave for years. It was ten years, the despair, and it was five days, and it was your childhood, and the time it took to cross

a bridge; it was the love you could not have of the woman who called your name; it was while you were farming, while you built a circular home. The crisis tied you to a chair and said, "Write!" then took your sentences as they landed. I farmed from my window. I went on excursions to find the words the crisis had removed from me, my sentences that the crisis sent on circuitous routes through every part of the city and dropped on people's heads, in crevices along the harbor, on the floors of banks, and made me go to them and made me sit here.

I BEGAN WRITING on my knees with my upper body bent over such that my head touched the floor space a palm's distance from my knees, my knees spread but my ankles touching, my ass resting on the backs of my legs, my face relaxed, my breath shallow. Blank pages lay in an open circle in front of my bending posture. I imagined myself in a forest. I wanted to begin the book about architecture. I began the book about architecture in a fetal position with the word "enclosure" caught in my breath. I extended my arm and wrote, "Walls create an enclosure in which dreaming separates itself from sleep," and that would be the first sentence of the book for many days as I sat over it waiting for my question to change. The new question would make it impossible for me to order my sentences this way. I had to write through a rainstorm. I didn't leave the

house; the winds were too strong. My neighbor's roof had fallen in. We all gathered at our windows to help. The rain seemed to go on for days as my word moved from "enclosure" to "valve" to "hinge" to something latinate that I could only say in my brain. It was an unassimilatable word that, nevertheless, seemed to push me in a direction I'd no intention of going.

AT NIGHT WE heard the city creak and move
and stand up and walk around and call
itself in the wind and bring rain and blow
through windows howling, whistling,
laughing. I lay in my bed terrified of the
deafening silence; I was bored. I was too
tired to turn on a light. It was time for
sleeping and being without personality;
you spooned someone if you could; you
grabbed him and penetrated him so he
couldn't hear the night. I didn't know
what the city wanted nor why it behaved
this way, and in the morning could find
no sign, nothing to corroborate what I'd
heard. We marked this time as the onset
of the crisis, those of us who'd heard the
city creaking, while those who slept through
it or were penetrated to sleep, they, for a
long time, didn't know what we meant by
"crisis." It was years before people began
to leave and ironically it was these who'd
never heard the night that left first. But, I

would wake and the windows of my study
would be blown out; I would toil in the
dark room with plastic and tape and
cardboard and nails, and after hours
I'd drag myself back to bed and sleep
as if I'd just returned from war, though
I had not known war and later learned
that war made sleep impossible. I'd
sleep, though, until light ripped through
my eyelids, and would wake and begin
repairing the damage with my right mind,
with stronger hands, and I'd go to my
study, and see nothing, maybe just one
pane broken, which I'd then wonder if
I'd broken myself.

THE FIRST PERSON reported to have left was an acquaintance of the group. He had a mechanical problem, which people began to attribute to the city: Hausen, they said, walked for hours without arrival. He left his house for the post office; he left to meet a friend for dinner; he wanted to take in a movie; he needed to go to his job at the National Gallery of Books. He moved with concerted effort. He tried to take a taxi. He tried to cross the border then immediately re-cross it. He asked acquaintances to give him rides. All we could ever say was that there was interference, those of us witnessing his failure. He seemed to get in the cars that pulled up next to him. He seemed to get on a bus. But only moments after one thought one had seen him go, he would be standing there. I couldn't arrive either. Zàoter put his arm through me. I was a ghost. I was afraid of haunting the city.

I turned to face Luswage; she put a cup in my hand. "I always walk," she said, and sat in oblique satisfaction. We turned to look out the large front window of the café that held us. He walked by. It was Hausen. I called his name in my throat, in the space under speaking. At this point everyone knew who he was; they recognized his fast-paced motionlessness. "Hausen walked by," someone said as if to record it. He hadn't become "the ghost" yet, the first to leave. He was in his body. You could touch him. Z. went to put his arm through Hausen's chest. Our table waited for his return. We all mimicked some form of breathing without actually breathing.

PEOPLE KEPT SAYING other people were fleeing the city and pointed to themselves. We became third persons, but not arrogantly so. I referred to myself as "Ana Patova," and said, "Ana Patova must have left." For a moment I thought I would sell my home and wrote in our newspaper, "Ana Patova wishes to sell her home; she is leaving." I read what I wrote and couldn't believe my words and couldn't respond to inquiries. "I am not leaving," I said to friends who'd read my ad. At the same time that they were convincing me to stay they themselves began to pronounce strange lines. "Hi, from Delaware," Duder Bello said on occasion. "I am still in France" (Luswage Amini). We were making chaos with our goodbye notes, and it wasn't as though leaving wasn't happening but that it just wasn't ourselves who were doing it. No one could name names. We all knew that Hausen wanted to go, and when he finally vanished, many of us felt

relief. We missed him, though we didn't know him (we knew his confinement), but we celebrated his departure as a threshold crossing. "Hausen finally made it," we'd say and clink our glasses. So, we knew that leaving was possible and that in many corners of our neighborhoods people were preparing to depart, and did depart. But, we couldn't call out to them, even when the time came and the deserter was someone we loved or someone with whom we worked and drank. Our mouths would empty, for a long time, would be dry, and when saliva came back to us, it was only to ourselves that we could point. "I'm leaving," I would misspeak without knowing. "I've left too," would say Luswage.

"WRITING FRIGHTENS ME," the mouth emitted as the eyes held me, peering out from the knees, the head between the knees, the mouth wanting to calm itself and say to the correspondent that making a book was nothing short of terrifying, even if the words lined up and no thought was needed as to what one was writing—her *pareis* differed from mine in these moments of distress. She lowered herself to speak generally of her fear, while to say what I wished I needed to scrape my ass against the ground, but I no longer had this kind of body. She had her head between her knees, but also one knee bent forward and the toes raised, and all she was saying was, "Writing terrifies me." I wanted to talk more specifically about the sentence but could only perform the paragraph. I was telling her, "Paragraphs go too far." She wanted me to elaborate, but this idea meant nothing to me. I lowered myself.

For one second, I spoke "sentence," which confused her, since all this time I'd been saying "paragraphs." It was a moment of our mouths missing one another. Her mouth was emitting sound. She seemed to be calling my name, breathing heavily, she seemed to put her words inside me. "Writing my frightening paragraphs," I said, involuntarily. "Your paragraphs grow on the walls of your books." We were inside an argument. I resisted my torso toward the ceiling. I let my hamstrings rise, something caught in my hip. It was an interruption. I was correcting her about my books: they did not have walls, they had holes dug deep in the earth. "It's frightening," she blew in my face.

I SAT IN one of the galleries of the Museum of Science and Anatomy, recovering from a story someone had told me, a story I would never write, but which would dictate my behavior for the next several years, everything from how I dressed and what I read to whom I saluted in the street and what scared me. The story wasn't given to me as most are, as some kind of choreography beaten against the body rather it was laid on top of my voice. I told the story, over the course of many days, to hundreds of people, or perhaps to only one person, again and again. It didn't seem to matter who heard it, only that I went on telling it. It was a story of moments, the moments of bewilderment that had begun to visit all of us, of which my time in this museum now was. You were bewildered by a certain sharp awareness that made you stop and sit down, usually to write a book,

but the book that was this story could not be written. It had become an intruder in my mouth, when I wanted to be silent, and sent me running out my door and, for many days, sitting in that gallery, staring at walls that had not yet been dressed but observing lines that were beautiful and could not be authenticated and were drawn by no one.

I WAS INVITED to the West to talk about the crisis. I declined the invitation, which was then rescinded. Several months passed and then I received an invitation. One country called me. It was Finland. A representative of Finland called my name. I was flattered that he'd put a bit of flourish to it. He'd learned something about his body. I wasn't going to Finland, but I liked that he'd asked me and bent his head. If I were to go somewhere and talk to people about what was happening in my country, I would need to have a good grasp of what had befallen it. But, I knew nothing. I couldn't go to Finland. The West was not available to me. My country was in a state of unspeakable emergency. You could lift your eyebrows when someone said so-and-so had left, but you couldn't put shoulders to it. You couldn't bend and show how your heart hurt. You couldn't answer questions from

Finland. But Finland called and I said something non-committal to keep Finland around, because it felt good that someone was looking in. I had no need to curtain the space in which I wrote, in which I worried. In fact, if I weren't able to look up from time to time to catch a neighbor steal a glance through my windows, I would not be able to progress in my work. I waited for interruptions. I waited for the feeling of eyes on me. Finland felt that I should reconsider. I felt simply that I should be seen.

WINDS SHOOK THE walls of the city, they did not. Waters from unknown valves flooded the streets, our streets were dry. My neighbors leaped from buildings, slammed their loneliness into the ground, no one leaped. I set my house on fire: I burned my first house down; I burned my second house. Luswage Amini burned her house. Zàoter Limici burned his house. Duder Bello destroyed his neighborhood with fire. Bresia burned the maps in her house, then burned her house down. My mother burned her house, even Vlati burned his—the Governor's palace. For weeks, dark smoke bruised the sky, yet the sky was clear; the sky was always clear. Someone flew over Ravicka and drew it and failed. Houses burned. They did not burn. The phone rang as I wrote that. I answered five years ago. "The city is on fire," the caller shouted. "We are destroyed." Luswage went to her summer

home and put fire to it. She called someone, me, someone else. We all had to let others know what we were doing. "I burned it, Luswage," I told her. "Why is it still here?" She arched her back climbing out of the tub, then burned her building down: "I stood in the ashes. I swear to you." "Goddamn," she said, looking up at the plane. We knew he was dropping matches to the earth, though they didn't land near us. The plane was supposed to crash. "Our houses were supposed to burn," I said about the crisis destroying our city.

WRITING WAS SOMETHING you did with the
the body, yet, oddly, sleeping was not.
Odd because you wrote in your sleep,
because you talked with your body, and
(you were informed) you talked in your
sleep. My body was my voice in most
sentences, but then there were these
sentences where it was not, sentences
from other cultures, sometimes the
way we talked about our food. You ate
in your body, but your body sometimes
couldn't speak these sentences. A woman
reached her hand toward me as we
passed on the street—it was Hello, it was
What time is it. I saw her every day of the
crisis. She put her hand through me and
talked inside my body. I took my body to
my publishers; I moved my body away
from the street; I bent it back and wrote a
book. I called it *The Wall Event*. I nodded
to Hausen as he passed by; this was an act
of my body. I slept in this body that

nodded and wrote books in my sleep, and
yet I had no body as I slept. I wrote
“torsion” on her pages. They were about
me. She was writing about all of us, and
this brought out my sleep. B. borrowed
my arm to say something. It was speech
rather than writing. Which was better?
We didn't know.

WE WERE ALL thinking about the public plaza—whether it could be called public anymore, whether, if no one gathered there, it still could be “our plaza,” our *ciut centali*. I stood there. I was alone. Bello stood there; he was alone. We tried to make plans to stand there together, to hold *tij* together, but our plans wouldn’t carry out. It was hard to explain what that meant, what it looked like. One would ask the other to meet at a certain time and the other would agree. We would leave our homes, in the way of Hausen, and do everything we could to arrive. We would arrive; we would be standing there, both of us, at the appointed time, but in a kind of erased space. But, was it the time or the plaza erased in that moment? Sometimes, you would be lucky enough to have a third party walk by and see you both standing there, and talk to you and

talk to the other, but look inquisitively at what seemed like your and the other’s not-talking. He would try to mend something that wasn’t torn, or was torn but more in the air than between you. There were places Tomás and I met where we could talk about our failure in the plaza—we met in museums, we met in the Central library, now evacuated—and there were places where the plaza could not have occurred to us, could never have existed: places that have no names here.

IT HAPPENED OCCASIONALLY that I'd be on a train and would see this amazing body of water that wasn't there. I would gasp. Any number of companions would come to my assistance. I would point out to them the situation of this body of water where a small boat drifted and the sky bounced deeply blue off the surface. On this slow-moving train silence would descend. My friends would show each other their pressed fingers. As a country this was our crisis: getting other people to see what we were seeing. And it wasn't as if there was this multitude of idylls we simply couldn't share but, rather, for the most part, there was only one idyll and for everyone else a void. The people on the train took my hallucination as a sign of their own suffering. You were better if you could hold a picture in your head, a scene or many scenes. But, I wasn't trying to be better. I was trying

to breathe and not hear what people were saying about this day in their life of the crisis. People suffered. They woke in a morning, before the sun rose. You didn't want to know. They wrote out a list of words. It was to be their secret, but all day they leaked their words, and I leaked my words. In the silence following my vision I couldn't help but say "*mostlip*" as people gathered around me. Then said "gap," then said "triumph." Your words, your words, someone admonished me. "Goodnight," I completed the list. People cared for me in long minutes of awkwardness in which I swooned and held my eyes closed in shame. Then Radha, who'd been the first to rush to me those many moments ago (which now seemed like a year) released: "tide," "crag," "toddler," and "posted" into the cramped body of the train.

I COULDN'T ARRIVE, so I stayed in my home, which was open to my wandering; it curled around me and asked me how I was doing, and didn't seem terribly upset that I wasn't doing fine. I wasn't sleeping so I pulled all the books from the walls; I drank the milk before it arrived. I called Luswage when I couldn't sleep and asked what new words she'd learned from abroad, and she'd say hold on, and be away for half the night. But I'd wait, and when she returned I took her words gladly. One night she said "*pequeño*" from the Spanish and we marveled over it into the morning. It was a phenomenal word. I wanted to write a book about it, but already had this book that was unfolding. I couldn't arrive any place and so was a kind of ghost in myself. I touched my body all the time. Days passed between long intervals of gauze, where I stared out at things and made lists and

drank tea and tried to get to my friends who waited for me, sometimes just on the other side of the door, and as much as I tried I often could not reach them. Z. would talk to me through the open window. "They are at the races," he'd say tenderly about someone we were missing. That my friends had gathered outside my door meant that they, too, had been without, that the one had gone and gotten the other, and the two the third, and needed me to complete the fourth wall of this intimate enclosure.

WALLS CREATED AN enclosure in which dreaming separated itself from sleep and the body stood up and walked into the city, but as an enclosed space that was walking to the wall and drawing a shape that invoked a figure bending forward with an arm thrust out, as if in offering, as if to make room for something facing, something turned and waiting to be welcomed, perhaps someone wanting to descend into the dense, narrow streets with you. The body draped over to draw another body, as it ventured from shop to shop, looking for books and tools and candles, the hand shading, the hand making spirals, the body on the wall reaching back wanting something; I didn't draw its head. I stopped at the shoulders; I didn't go below the shins. I read the wall with my dictionary, the *Book of Gestures* by Soudouzi. I drew a hand that was missing something, then

drew a line from that hand, a thin, fragile line that came forward, bent, turned, broke, resumed its progression but now below the previous line, that moved toward a letter, that leaned into language, that reminded me of its body, then my body, was something like a map or just a message that said "move" or just a failure of the third dimension, when you found out they weren't walls, when you woke up.

THERE WAS AN intervening at the beginning of the despair that allowed some of us to go on in the vein of waiting and surviving and walking the gutter of the suddenly dry canal while not actually doing those things, just writing about them. In the intervening we wore long scarves around our necks and held our notebooks close. Someone wrote "the time in between" on a wall and laughed at himself. I pulled my scarf tighter, also looped it through my jeans, and on occasion would tie myself to a telephone pole and stand there until something fell from the sky. Hausen would walk by with his suitcase. Luswage would bring me lunch. Luswage Amini wrote "greatly" on the wall inside her garden, and on the days I was rigged to the pole, she brought me lunch. There were still greens you could eat thick and veiny,

and grains cooked in clarified butter. There was tea, which you ate like food. The intervening mystified my writing practice. I lost count of my books; the stack fell over in my sleep and I crashed to the floor; many nights in a row the books did not hold me, but all the while there was this sense that we were not yet feeling what we felt. It gave you a preview, a time to outline, a time to make a line down your wall.

TIME PASSES. EVERYBODY knew it, everybody wrote those words, everybody grew addicted to caffeine and wanted valium. Everybody knew it. Time would pass through this. Zäoter pulled back and looked into my face. Time was all over him; it was invisible, but also heavy and grave. It was his language, the words he spoke, and it was my hearing his language, and my words, which differed somewhat from his. "Everybody knew it," I thought in unison with his looking. Ravic killed me. I couldn't use it anymore. (He closed his eyes.) But, I had nothing else. "We've all written this," I said about the book I was writing to the group that was also writing, but each of us individually, with our arms thrown out over our pages. I leaned over the book in front of me. Ravic killed me when I wanted to speak about time; it had no discourse. It could not think time as it was also thinking

"produce sense" or "make space," or whatever it was it thought as we bent our bodies over tables. But, time passed through us nevertheless and wasn't beyond description but couldn't be clocked and couldn't be avoided. (He opened his eyes; he removed a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. The sound carried across the café. People turned from their conversations. The elders clapped. Then time passed through it, and we grew silent.) "Everybody knew it," I was able to stretch and say. "Everybody wrote it."

I WROTE A book where the maps were jumping out of the page, and I couldn't understand them and they seemed to want to escape but wouldn't let go completely. This was going to be my book on Ravicka for the times. The maps were pictures of our living, where we walked, where our monuments stood, where we met for coffee, our bookstores: the grid in blown out detail. The maps were phone numbers that no longer worked, they were addresses that fell off buildings. The maps were the names we called those walking away. Sirin Cucek was a map, because she translated for us. But, the maps wouldn't stay in the book so the book wouldn't close, and this was a problem. Yet, I wanted the maps to represent the city and to do this they needed to be in motion the way all structures in Ravicka were, but this is not what you asked of maps, so perhaps

I was calling the "conveyance" by the wrong name. Maps couldn't move and space couldn't move, yet, within both, the object world was alive and in a fidget. The book I was writing couldn't exist without these maps that separated streets from sentences, that showed awnings in paragraphs, that always had a river.

LINES WERE STILL in nature I noticed one day of the crisis; many things were gone but I saw that lines had remained. If you looked for them, you found them everywhere. A line cut the path in front of me and intersected the lines of the pavement. It was a line that had arrived from another country, Hungary, I thought. It moved like it had a complex story to tell that would be three hundred and fourteen pages long. It looked like it wanted to move without paragraph breaks and follow a group of people through a desolate landscape. The line cut me off at Jandovirr and pushed me across the Boulevard. I didn't know where we were going. Hausen was sitting on a park bench. His back made a line, like a cut into the air around him, against the horizon of the bench. There was a constant proliferation of lines: the sun made lines, the streets. These lines

often inscribed feeling, I began to notice. The line under the eye of the stone face that looks out over the south part of the city, how it worries, how the face that twins it (looking north) cheers. It seemed productive to ask Hausen for a line, since he was sitting there and appeared to be writing (in a couple of weeks, though I didn't know this at the time, Hausen would be gone) but as it happened Hausen was not writing.

HAUSEN WROTE A book that everyone was reading. It went that way with men, and yet this was a book that meant a lot to me and led to a book of my own. Hausen wrote a book in the time before the crisis and people carried it around in their back pockets; it was mass produced. In the book, a man walked over a bridge and entered a building, where he jumped into a pool with a mineral-green bottom. He swam back and forth. He did a breast stroke, he worked from his back, he banged his body against the water, he sang, he shouted. He climbed out and exited the building, leaving a trail of water. The book described the water as text; the drops were signs. They doubled the story of Hausen's character. He was a man who swam at night in empty buildings. The man went home to someone who did not seem quite like a woman, but who

also was not identified as a "man." The man coming home lay on top of this person and swam and told a story, which was a confession, and the body gasped, but we did not know if the man's story was causing this gasping or whether the cause was his writhing. The reader couldn't hear the story, but Hausen had the language around the story crack and drop heat on us. And the body writhed on top of the other body and whispered to it about something done and undone in the city, something sitting under water, something terrible.

I WALKED OUTSIDE and was struck by the same migrating building that had been crossing my lawn since the previous night. I didn't know where it was going and there was no way to stop it and I wasn't trying to stop it when I stepped outside. I only wished to observe the magnitude of its destruction. But I stepped outside as it neared the front of my house, and time did this strange thing. I walked out and seemed to have been dislocated from the place I had just been and this building struck me; I fell down and lost the notebook I was carrying, the notebook in which I was writing about the migrating buildings of Ravicka. What could I say without it? I wrote the book anyway, then wrote another book, a prequel to the first. I walked around with the cartographer, Levric Pelín, and made notes for the third book, which would precede—in

time and treatment of its topic—the second book that was then the “first.” The Hidden Streets Council asked me to appear. I had to say again that you could not find what you have found in Ravicka, today, because of the crisis (of course, not saying “crisis”) and backed out of the room with my “defective” notes, into the defective city.

MANY NIGHTS I found myself writing a book in a foreign language. If I didn't think about it, I could write pages and pages without disruption, but if I stopped to think, "What is this language and how is it that I know it," I could not progress. I wrote in my sleep, with my fingers in the air. I wrote before sleeping. I wrote in the instant of waking, and even though I had fluency in this language, it was an extremely difficult book to write. I couldn't see it. I couldn't separate what the book was about from how it looked to write it, in the sense that, though I was using a language I knew implicitly, I couldn't see what I knew. This language was without script; it was like a body, three bodies, moving about in space. It was three bodies moving about in a space of three circles, where each circle had props and other peripheral animations. The language was more a

drama than a script. It didn't have a surface that you read but was instead a stage, where bodies made meaning, but distinctly not as representation. All I could say was that these bodies were the pieces of that language. I watched it dance in front of me, which was how one wrote in this world, and wrote a book as I slept on top of my other books that would be indisposed to talk to this strange one.

THERE WAS A crisis within the crisis of our crisis that seemed to affect us most when we were sitting together over coffee. It was a crisis of communication that made us stutter in ourselves and made us silent with each other. Not entirely silent but limited severely in pushing forward a conversation, as if our language presumed we wanted to discuss the crisis, which it would not allow, and seemed to find our efforts to ask each other about our work as evidence of that desire. We couldn't speak in sentences and couldn't use signal words, but oddly were allowed to speak the titles of our books freely. Yet, to correspond with the names of our books, we also had to do things with our breath and the corners of our eyes. "The Magnificent Realist Buys Canada," Zàoter said one day, nodding toward the person walking by. It was the title

of his one and only novel. Zàoter nodded, inhaled very deeply, then released one sharp breath every few seconds until his oxygen was exhausted. We were alarmed by his pallor. Of course, it was Hausen walking by. It was always Hausen. But, to determine whether or not Zàoter was referring to Hausen's ghostliness or just his gait or the bag he was carrying, which was not the usual suitcase he lugged around but was something compact, Amini had to ask, with no breath, "Envelopes and Bridges?"

I HELD MY breath often, I did not breathe, my throat resisted the air. I moved down the street, failing. I could not breathe. My body wanted to be rid of me. I didn't have words for the buildings and their turned-in windows, folded into their evacuated state. I had lost architecture. I couldn't remember the parts of a building, so I held my breath (what was the name of that thing?). Too much time had passed. I had forgotten everything. Where was my body in this walk I did, where I moved for hours between neighborhoods and tried to read the city as it rearranged itself? I turned, I turned around, it changed. I held my breath, it wasn't funny. I couldn't think of one funny thing to say about it. But, one does not exactly breathe when one laughs, so I went on trying to be funny. You wanted the not-breathing to say something about the buildings that breathing failed to say.

Zàoter and I sat at table with our breath in our hands, while Luswage and Bello urged us to return to breathing. I wanted someone to laugh; on most days, that was all I wanted. Luswage called at night and mimicked laughter through her not-breathing but her sound had no joy in it. I imagined her cramped and alone and asked her to stop her performance and sat with her as she returned to form.

WE TRIED TO understand the crisis on a large scroll of paper that many of us carried through the city, that the four of us carried, that Levric Pelín carried and passersby carried, that Vlati was asked to carry but refused to carry, that Hausen carried. It was something unfurling, taking the place of events that were no longer occurring. I scrawled on this paper a hundred times: "The wind is blowing, the buildings are swaying in the wind," because it was true and because, though it was true, it wasn't happening properly. The crisis happened in our eyes and in our imaginations, how we made sense of what we saw, the flinty bridges between, but there was nothing we could do about our eyes, so we carried that scroll of paper. At one point or another, someone would make a mark that was like a measurement, something to indicate change, a change that somehow talked

about nothing. "The nothing we are doing," Luswage would remind me and would write on our archive. But, everyone was always marking off things they'd finished—books they'd read, books they'd written, meetings held—yet sitting in this empty feeling. The whole time, empty, and waiting for the city to pick up again, though taxis still pulled up and asked you where you were going.

I WROTE A book about a group of friends surviving a crisis and then the book became my life. I named it, once I realized this was happening, once I saw that I was writing on the previous day the script of the subsequent day, in terms of who I saw and what I thought, as I moved through the city; once I saw this, I named the book and made it so that the life I was writing was also the life I had lived: it wouldn't just go one way. It wouldn't just be that I was living what I had written. I had to live in order to write, and I had to meet my friends and receive their writing in order to write, and they needed to see me write in order to go on writing, and we all needed to sit in that café and wait out this crisis that was taking away all the other writers. And not just the writers but also the bus drivers and Bello's students and the people who rode the trains and

the audiences for our readings. I named the book that had become my life after the events of my life so that there would be no distinction. There was no distinction in my living; there was no break between days. You went to sleep, your body rested, but nothing changed. You woke into the same circling terrain of the city, the same buildings wandering and knocking into each other and knocking houses down, but nothing falling and no plaster coming off, just waddling and knocking and stomping buildings looking all the time normal but being absolutely unconventional in form.

"SPACES MOAN," I began that first book on our buildings. "They are of another order." I wrote these sentences every morning, as I sat in cit Ramtala, sometimes into the book I was writing but more often on scraps of paper, which I collected and hid from myself. I wrote sentences about space so that I could stand up and walk down that hill. I wrote them, because the hill was too steep to descend gracefully with your body upright and steady. Spaces moaned when you crossed them; they didn't know how to hold you. They were of the order of crossing, but not of understanding the human body. I rolled down the hill in search of space, new space to apply the question of our living. Hausen was tired of moving his hands to music. He left his bench and ran toward Sirin Cucek, who was making her slow way across the square. He handed her a book and asked

her to read. I wrote a sentence sitting on the edge of the square, where space was supposed to open up and become the space I was thinking; and Hausen wanted the lines of the plaza to open and reveal stairs or a runway from which to depart. Sirin read Hausen's book to a group of people forming around her, to Hausen, holding *tij*, to an entourage of elders. I remained outside the circle, but understood that those within it were swaying to her words, now some sleeping (the elders); Hausen, re-entranced with his hands, conducted their happiness, which also was his.

AT WHICH POINT the scroll became the heaviest thing in the city, the most engaging and the most inscrutable. The more people there were to carry it, the more bulky it grew—how quickly its surface was covered, how quickly erased of logic and organization, yet how quickly a community document, a blur of symbols, a grid. Every meter you crossed was a point of observation for someone, though where you were in this line of inhabitants depended on when you felt the observation; it was something that you came upon eventually but also something experienced at the time it was inscribed. You began to take on other people's sentiments, because of the weight and translucence of the scroll, because the threads of the paper did not take well to ink, because ink was all there was. "Jandovirr is changing," I wrote into the scroll one day. "It has changed." But,

when I noticed these words appearing all over the scroll, sometimes saying Jandovirr, sometimes Mohaly or cit Sahaly or names from other parts of the city but all the same vague observation—changing—when I saw this I began to write in greater detail: "the manhole cover had been replaced; Kiva's was packed with people, they seemed like foreigners. A couple stood on the corner waiting for a light that was inoperable, they waited," and wrote out tracks of details of my seeing, until I started to see these particulars repeating along the scroll. You worried that the crisis was following you and, because of how closely it mirrored your thinking, that you were the crisis.

I WROTE A book where after every sentence I or my character or an object in the room disappeared. The book grew into five hundred and forty-two pages, which surprised everyone, a book where it was not right to add periods, where you couldn't partition with commas or ellipses, where you couldn't vanish by telling people you were vanishing—you dissolved, you cut, you cleaved. It was a book in which I recognized a companion text, one that would hold everything this book was erasing. I would have to write this book as well, but not in this room, not on this hill. I felt I'd have to go somewhere new in order to see it, into a world that could hold the things I was missing, and Luswage was missing, and everyone. The book I'd have to write would not take over the world as our current books did but would just be a kind of archway, a beginning. I wrote a

sentence and downtown was gone; the last building stood up and walked away, the fourth since that morning; I wrote a sentence to replace the building (everything that vanished got replaced, at least in the book I was writing), but its space in the object world remained empty. A new object vanished: I was still writing.

TOMÁS BELLO POURED water into our glasses and asked us to be silent as he wrote something down, to be silent but watch him as he wrote for the first time in a long time. He wrote elaborately, and in the duration Zàoter fell asleep and Luswage Amini fell asleep. I became his audience of one. Everyone was writing in these days of the crisis. Everyone was walking and everyone was writing. The city was a sieve and a lost map, where you needed to write in order to understand where you were going. You gave up any kind of tubular transport and relied only on your body, itself a functioning root system. The book B. was writing was on how our language branched under our speaking but he needed silence in order to write it, yet also needed company. "The rhizomic nature of the *tij* that allows you to move out horizontally," he read to me, "as two or more bodies stand in

vertical agreement, in silence, as the *tij* wanders between, but mostly, beneath them." He went on to say, "Her body, his body," indicating our friends, loving them in their plaiting—Z's arm hooked through L's, their silent rhizomic sleeping.

LUSWAGE CALLED TO say Hausen had left and would I meet her in an alley and we met and stood there, not talking, which was odd for us, but standing and staring and occasionally running a hand through the hair, lifting a lock. Hausen left and it was as if the air was pulled from our bodies and something was polluting the social environment. People stopped gathering, they stayed silent, they began to tell bizarre stories: Hausen had been abducted and any of us could be next. Hausen had disappeared. The city suffered. Crowds became obsolete. We traversed the streets in single file. We didn't know what would happen so refused to go outside or when we did go outside refused the public aspect of this excursion. I met Luswage in an alley when the "moments" began, and would stand there and would stare at her. We would stand close and would stare at one

another until our eyes hurt, until the skin beneath our eyes tremored and beyond that point. Luswage Amini stood next to me. Nothing in the world could deter this, no storm, no regulator. Hausen had gone, relations were strained. We feared the worst, which were the moments that tore you away from the city. For love, you met in alleys, you bowed and gathered in your hands someone's hair, you hid when you heard voices, and you stared. You stared. And at the end of it sheets of paper were exchanged.

BUILDINGS WERE LIKE night creatures, looking for an underground, where they could meet other buildings and make relations, relations beyond any that could be imagined by the human mind. They met in our blindsight, while we turned our heads to answer a question, while we were bent in *pareis*. They moved noiselessly across the city, leaving the story of their ambulations in our bodies—how we ached and searched for them. We never saw a building move but were always picking ourselves up from the ground and could rarely find the place we were looking for on the day that we were looking for it (it was out there somewhere). And, though we had become the story of their wandering, we had no way to engage them. How did you find out what was wrong, how did you say what you needed to say? It had to be more than description. You talked

about buildings as if they were animals, but buildings were mostly numbers: where angles met, the fluid dynamics of material, how the wind moved them, but didn't knock them over. The Pouissart was in cit Barnje instead of ciut centali, where it was built, because of numbers desiring other numbers: patterns breaking, re-threading otherwise.

"TO THINK OF architecture, is to do what, Ana Patova?" she asked me when the reports came out that our population had been decimated by three years of bewilderment and a feeling that one had been ghosted, the total number of inhabitants now only an eighth of what it had been. "Why have we remained?" you wondered when you sat empty. The crisis made you watch it and so did architecture, which you did until it devastated you, then beyond that point (you still looking at it). My thinking of architecture resulted from my thinking of the line, how the line made narrative regardless of whatever else it was making, and narrative presented enclosures for your questions about living, and living, for the most part, required space, which turned out to be a definite field of study. But, in order to enjoy architecture I realized I needed people, so I didn't

know what to do when they began to flee. I wrote a book in which I explained all of this; it was one hundred and eighty-three pages and said "crisis," "crisis" in every chapter and used drawings to illustrate the "empty feeling," which I believed to be the cause for everyone's leaving. Not everyone could move about a city as if she were traversing a remote highland, as if she were the last pedestrian in the world. Not everyone could say "farewell" all the time with her exhausted body, clambering over some pole.

THE CITY THAT existed ran like a film playing in a small movie house on a forgotten street in the blown out part of the city we swore never to enter, never to grace, because of some tragedy no one remembered but which haunted our movements in the "safe" parts of the city, which counted for most of Ravicka. It was too imbalanced: that there was this block of streets, off limits to our living, and within this block breathed the real body of our city, the one that existed rather than painted itself to exist, the living one, at least as I came to think of it, though I had never seen that film. I tried to arrive at the movie house, but got turned away each time. It was the film of the decade and would tell me how to live and would open into new streets, where bodies were possible, where architecture exceeded itself and took care of the environment, brought

the park into itself, danced around the canal, where water ran next to and summer bodies floated by. It wasn't a utopia playing there but the real built environment, the one that went with the language you spoke, that could handle the verbs of your language. It was the city, but was unreachable, was violent, without victims and without perpetrators, and violent, though there were no crimes.

SOMETHING ARRIVED IN the mail that said something something about Ravicka I couldn't read, accompanied by photos obscured by the paper on which they were printed. These were pictures from abroad about our conditions, or so the cover letter had explained, images from a satellite, the interior of an orange juice glass from what I could tell, though the caption read uh uh the city. People in the West thought I was an ambassador of the despair, because of all the books I had written. But I knew nothing. I brought the photos to the café. "We Sleep," I began with my eyes closed, extending the photographs to the group. "The Impossible Birds of Hildur," Luswage grabbed them from me. "I Forgot to Say," said Zàoter. I lifted my shoulders. "Another Day with no Wind," Luswage spoke sadly with three creases at each eye. Tomás Bello, for a long time, made bass sounds with

his body (his titles were limited, he had to use them wisely), and the pictures were spread across the table. Zàoter pointed to one of them. It was a blur of grays and blacks. He opened his mouth, we waited. There was nothing. You want to look inside an open mouth or at least place your ear against it. "The Terrible People," I nudged Tomás, and he leaned forward. "Houses," said Zàoter, eventually. "Houses of Mohaly," said Luswage. "Houses, Bridges, Canals," finally came B. I turned the photo over and completed the conversation: "Hidden Streets."

I BEGAN TO walk to the houses of my friends through a kind of detection that made the walking take all day, and it was more than the problem of circling the Stejz rotary until the proper street revealed itself, as was needed to arrive at Zàoter's, rather it was that you found yourself having to reject the concept of buildings as landmarks, such that when you saw something you recognized you turned away from it, because even if it was the Tûz Building it was sitting in the wrong neighborhood. Nevertheless, it was this incongruity that helped me understand the way to go: to see Luswage (on the day I encountered the Tûz) I had to turn, dip, and turn. I had to start at Szent Fösna and move stealthily across the plain, even though the plain was Czorcic Street and everyone, of those who were left, was busy, and to be stealth looked no different than walking slowly

with your head down. I entered the Sküllburg, descended the steps into the subway (that should have been dormant but wasn't), and sat to eat my lunch. I drew lines based on how the tracks ran and where debris bisected them. I returned to the surface. I crossed a bridge I could see in the distance by saying I was crossing it and let my body move this way for a time, standing at this intersection (in my body), observing the lights change. A bus went by, two people on bikes, an elder slowly going.

THERE WAS A book I was writing that was also a series of drawings as well as a file of questions about tensile structures; it was a book about the last building erected in ciut centali, a sequence of flapping frozen tents that housed our world market (when crowded spaces were still possible in Ravicka). I was no longer an architect but I thought of architecture everyday. I thought of these structures, because they were new to me and spoke a language of equations I didn't understand. I wrote paragraphs toward the problem, but each sentence was a drawing. The page was a mess of geometric postulates that failed as I unfolded them. I hung the pages of that book on the walls of my house and drank tea. I paced in front of the drawings; I attempted to translate the lines on fresh paper as "further drawings." I was forced outside with my sketchbook, but

I couldn't traverse the sidewalks. I drew from memory. I wrote from memory. And the only time the drawings resembled those figures pinned to my walls was when I was writing, but the words didn't convey what I felt. Suddenly, I wanted to be an artist. I thought of the young man flying his airplane above the city, I thought of his matches descending and the mess they made (were they my pages, too?) and their potential violence (for being unlit matches), and appended that thinking to this book, which could not stand the shape of letters and did not like forward movement and mostly wanted to shade the page, to spiral and to scratch.

OUR SITTING WITH each other in the café fit inside a mental image, in each of our minds, of our sitting. The fact of our sitting was something that could be witnessed by any passerby, and this, what she saw, was the outside version of our sitting, distinct from the versions present in us. We each thought about our sitting over the many years that we did this and put that thought inside an image of our doing it (how we imagined ourselves looking). Yet not only did our images differ—mine from L.'s, L.'s from B.'s, etc.—but also each of the infinitude of images within us differed: one moment of noticing that you were still sitting with them, your friends, and were years into a crisis that appeared to have no end, fractured into increasingly smaller moments of noticing you're still with them, which kept dividing with every new word or

gesture added to the gathering. And though these images were sequestered inside us, they all belonged to each other, and only together could tell the proper story of our sitting, which was also the story of this crisis.

SUCH THAT I began to write a book about the real, breathing body of Ravicka, which I couldn't reach by walking toward it and couldn't reach by attending to it, as I might attend to any other subject in my books. I couldn't reach this Ravicka, which was two-dimensional, a projection and a centrifuge. I couldn't reach Ravicka, because it lay in a book and I had placed it there and put inside it the Ravicka I could reach, the Ravicka of our days and our coffee. I wrote the real Ravicka into a book and put inside it the only Ravicka I had. Yet, inside that Ravicka, the one in which I wrote my books (and L. and Z. wrote their books), was that of the first, and though it was placed in a book and had a fiction growing out of it, it was real and breathing: it contained fictions but it breathed and remembered us and held out the possibility of future architecture, where, even though our buildings were

in motion and the terrain was constantly reshaping itself, we were part of a conversation. You looked into the book to say these things but the language you needed was outside in the physical city, in that theatre that would not show itself.

ANA PATOVA WANTS to write a book on *dahar*, I thought to myself, as I sat looking out over the city. She wanted to write a book on yellow, because the sky was yellow and the gift in my lap was wrapped in yellow, the same yellow as the sky Ana was seeing, the *dahar* of my waiting. "The sky was yellow," Ana considered as a first line to her new novel. The air not the sky was yellow, she argued as I lay my eyes against the red roofs below me. "Ana Patova would like to say hello to Luswage Amini," I said as if writing my own book to the woman who'd just approached our bench. Ana Patova looked up and became beautiful in her relief. "I'm trying to write *dahar*," Ana said to Luswage Amini, and I flipped over the package in my lap. "But, I can't see it for writing," she said after Luswage completed her *pareis*, which was an

elaborate laying bare of words and a re-parting of Ana's hair. "Look at what I'm bringing you from France," Luswage yelled across to Ana Patova, who had not descended the hill in many days.

THE BOOKS BETWEEN us made a curved surface of the table when we gathered them that morning and placed each one with purpose in a heap, our books, all that we had written. We lay our books on the table to see its surface curve and see the books fall in and fall through themselves. The surface of the table curved right before our eyes, but not because of the weight of our books. The surface curved because the books were passing through themselves in a kind of invisible writing, a re-writing that had nothing to do with us. I dropped my book on architecture into the table to witness its self-intersection: how it would read itself then turn itself into a new form. But not concretely, not in a way my eyes could see. Yet, irrevocably, in that no matter its return to architecture, this book would always carry that other thing within it, and though I would learn

nothing about its alterity, my chemistry would be changed from the process, being the author of this book, the author of some of the books to have fallen into the table. The table curved in anticipation of the body's self-intersection and almost made a mirror, but took our books instead. They fell through; we waited for them. Zàoter scratched his head, was it the right thing for him, for his books, where he sat with them, were they even themselves, and held them at a distance once they returned.

THE NOTION OF thinness, I thought, as the two of them sat on either side of an important threshold that neither seemed capable of seeing for the six hundredth time in their history, was this sitting here between them and who I was supposed to be now in this new emergency, when Ana Patova and Luswage Amini couldn't cross this bridge, again. It wasn't so much a line between us as a bend in time, a fold where one had to walk through fire, or believe this to be the case. Luswage Amini believed she could not get across to Ana Patova as long as Ana Patova remained in Ravicka. "Luswage Amini is in France" became the material of that thinness. I put my arms through them, both of them at the same time: I put my left, I put my right. I waved my arm about inside myself and tried to look down and peer at it, to see it through the thin window of my body. My arm was in

her chest when Amini stood up and leaned over and grabbed Ana Patova's ear and whispered something that I should have heard since my arm was in Ana as well as in Luswage, and in me. I didn't hear what she said so Ana Patova didn't hear, or I couldn't feel through the book I was writing that she'd heard.

WHEN I APPROACHED the house of Zàoter Limici I had to walk backward along the streets (deserted), but not literally with my back moving forward, rather, walking as if north were south and north were east and entering a rotary was to be spun around a wheel (deserted) and disorganized as a being of the world, yet to have exits along the way that led out to time, but each exit (deserted) opening to a different quality of time and those times being in correspondence with a set of streets that were reassigned (deserted) as often as there was weather, as often as the sky did something remarkable, and in a certain set of streets, in what was called "yellow time" was the house of Zàoter Limici. I arrived. I leapt out of the whirling rotary. I arrived again (deserted): it was double time. From where you stood these streets were like

any other you'd see in Ravicka: they had houses, the houses moved slightly, the houses were vertical in nature, they each had names and dates. But, if you were standing (deserted) in this same spot in the city on the other side of the rotary, of having been spun in it, you didn't see these streets. It was impossible to remember what you did see. So, perhaps you did see these streets, but this didn't matter if you couldn't remember, if you didn't know you were there. The object was to arrive (deserted) and open your face and yell the name of your friend.

A GROUP HAPPENED, because place and time had done something to you: you were waiting for a train, you were waiting for a city to stabilize, for its buildings to stay in place, for traffic to return, for there to be traffic, and you wanted to write about it, even though you didn't understand it, and you wanted other people to read what you wrote—your friends, who were also writing—and you wanted language to move out of you and out of them into the space between you and for it to do some extraordinary thing of bending and becoming, in the way of these bodies surrounding the table, for language to take on dimensions of the body and for the books you wrote to come out this way, as light bodies. Zàoter wanted to turn his language into a map, so he approached the table of our seeing. He bent over the table, he spoke as he was bending, he hurt himself. We

moved over to make space for him. I was there, because I wanted to be alone. I wanted to build a text. I wanted my buildings to curve and canopy. I wanted to love. I wanted the books I wrote to explain what I saw, to make visceral the objects of my seeing. I wanted to straddle this one woman. I wanted to call out her name. I had travel on my mind. I came to the table. I needed new words. I needed science. You performed this and then the group absorbed you. Amini wanted to climb chairs—she came to the group. Tomás Bello missed his students. The group was one and it was four and it was waiting and it was the story of our waiting.

EVERY TIME I wrote a sentence something disappeared, and after many thousands of sentences, some of which I didn't keep or didn't like, I began to look for those vanished things. I also wondered whether it was more that they were invisible than vanished. I thought writing had something to do with invisibility and the world tried to show you this as often as it could, but disappearances seemed to have more to do with not writing, from the way things looked in the city, among my friends and acquaintances. You were losing hope if you weren't writing, which isn't the same as things going invisible. You were losing hope, too, if you were writing, but it was a different kind of loss, because there was always something you had more of when you were done writing, even if it was sentences that you hated. I wrote sentences about how men sleep and my wooden spoons vanished, or perhaps

were no longer visible to the eye. Most of the sentences I wrote I did so without thinking of the consequences of objects going missing. I was often trying to write about the crisis, which was hard and took everything you had, which was almost all your language for that day. One day I stopped writing and asked after the vanished things; I wanted to know where they were. It was strange to have had them go away so silently. I asked into the room where they were and wondered about the thing and all the things that replaced it. Would they all come back at once?

THERE WAS RINGING in my mouth. I hummed so I could see it. Somebody was looking at me. It was Hausen. Hausen had walked by and stopped and was now staring. It was Z. and it was me and suddenly Hausen, but Hausen stood on the other side of the window, his bags in tow, his silence. Zàoter stood up and walked to the counter, leaving Hausen and me to figure out who we were to each other (there was never enough time) and who we were to this glass between us and any possible reflection. Zàoter called to me from the counter. "Two," I returned to him. He called again. "I don't know," I confessed. "Hausen?" I asked, but Hausen couldn't hear me and wouldn't step inside. "Hausen?" Zàoter called from the counter (you began to wonder if he were really there). I hummed as I waited for coffee and the

man tapped the window. I looked up. It was Hausen, who was a phenomenon: you saw him; it made you think. "We're in place," I mouthed against my reflection, then leaned back to see the small cup. Two people were calling my name and leaning and scraping the floor and one of them pulled my ear and brushed her mouth against my brow and the other grabbed the shoulder of Z. and tapped it and wrote (without ink) across it, probably something about the man outside, then this same one turned to me. He raised his right knee, he spoke without sound, he brought his open palm to his abdomen. "Uh Huri," he said.

WE SAT IN darkness and experienced vision as a group of people sitting. We saw, because we believed in each other's seeing, though we ourselves were blind to what was possible to be seen, which was nothing. There was nothing to see because we were in this group of familiars and the despair was all around us. Years were passing, we were growing old, somebody was handing out glasses. You heard a man groan when someone stumbled over him (the light was really too low); you felt people were touching themselves and touching others and failing. Downtown had re-established itself in the eastern extreme of the city, so you had to go there to get warm. I drew an x on a map and said, "You go here and wait for me." I didn't know to whom I was speaking. It was the crisis, everything was dark. But the people who surrounded me were my friends

and though we weren't writing books at the time of this gathering I understood us because of the books we had written. I was safe because of these books. I could say, "Come to me," because of them. What was seen was also something related to our reading, but visible only in darkness, only in darkness did it become nothing and full of color, only in the dark did it abstract itself and move about the head of the person across from you, only when you said, "Yes," only when you let Tomás Bello do your seeing.

THE OBJECT WORLD bowed and slept and grew enormous as something completely without space, as a container without volume, lightless, soundless, and did this inside a world even larger and more obscure than itself, a world we were walking through, which no one knew what to call (other than "old") and no one understood the dimensions of but which was ours, this grid that had been touched by a circle, these noisy, impenetrable doors. We had been walking for hours, looking for a happening, a boundary event that would put an end to the crisis, not an extraordinary occurrence—some magical intervention—but a small act out of a cabinet of everyday acts that we'd witnessed numerous times and never noticed and never saw the way through. We thought it would be a speech act, so began to look for instances where we might chance upon bodies in unconscious

speech: we looked through people's windows. But windows looked into houses whose structures were no longer reliable. It had become impossible to say that you were contained, to say "hello, the house," as you once had. The object world, we noted, was drawn on by shadows.

THE GROUP OF us walking began to rewrite that group of us sitting at the café and we became something like a party in a living room, though nothing yet being celebrated but someone perhaps giving a talk and other people asking questions, or all of us sharing letters from abroad, which were sometimes being translated by Sirin Cucek, though most of the time experienced as visual pieces. These were gatherings where someone showed a film and we watched a cow eating grass for ten minutes and, after the cow left, we watched the grass, not blowing in the wind but frozen and wet with mud. We watched a large man situate bottles across the surface of a desk, the washed out light landing where the bottles were old, and his doing this again and again, making the film long. Someone fell asleep and we drew close. Tomás Bello wanted to talk about what we were seeing, but

Luswage refused him. We had taken the long walk here, and had done so days in a row as this film transpired then began again.

THE HOUSE WAS an image that the house recognized among all the other images it contained. "The house was full of images," was something that you'd read and sat in as you sat in your house and became one of its images. "The house held a picture of your living." I stepped into my house after hours of being in the rain; I sat in a chair and looked out the window into the street through which I'd just passed, looking for something at the same time that something else was ticking in the room and something further was ringing. In my reflection I saw myself looking through the window, out at the street that had just bore me. You leaned back into the house. It held every picture and was a picture itself. It held you, it held itself, it held your past, what you had just done, what you did days ago. It knew what you did while you were away. "The house was divided by images

into rooms," the book was trying to say, and it was a book you were reading, which meant there was a picture of this somewhere. The house recognized itself among the many images it contained and sort of put itself aside. You entered the house and something rang; you ran to it: there was silence. You suspected she was on the other side, or perhaps just an image of her. Sometimes our houses talked to each other and migrated. "Hello, hello," she said softly.

SPACES MOANED. THEY were of an order that had nothing to do with what we felt when we were in them; they had become impossible to write about, impossible to enter, impossible to leave. You wanted to say "space, space" to create an index of where you went and what happened to you, you wanted to say "café," you wanted to say "alleyway," you wanted to say "bedroom." "Train," was a place you needed, "museum," "cemetery." You gave names so that you could return to the walls between experience; you stamped time onto things so that you could recognize the walls. Spaces moaned; they did not want your walls. The names I gave most often did not fit. I walked "outside" into a "closet" that was supposed to be a "yard," because the light of "day" had come up and "people" were waiting for me and "books" wanted to pass

through themselves and other books, and "language" needed to be made. I woke and stretched my body and felt pain in my hands. "Today" was a broken index. But, still, you felt the presence of "world" there inside the room (and outside the room). It couldn't be avoided and asked to be opened and was open all the time. But what you did with where your body went, how you wrapped words around it, calling it something that might be useful to others, who also did not know space, which was everyone, was of an order inconsequential to the space you inhabited.

I WENT AROUND the room asking everyone I saw if the postcard in my hand really did say, "Hi from Delaware," and really was signed "Tomás Bello," which was the seventh such card I'd received. We were surprised that the postal service was still possible, that things still arrived from abroad. Where was Delaware, such that it could send you messages? I knew where Delaware was, but my knowledge of it made these cards no clearer, no more possible, except here they were in my hand. "Tomás writes from Delaware," I described to others that night, then studied their faces. No one believed Tomás was in Delaware, but no one believed he was in Ravicka either, as long as I was carrying around that postcard. The "Tomás" that was in the room was having trouble with himself and wanted me to surrender the card, but didn't want to ask me and didn't

want to take something so important away from me (I hugged it to my chest, looked forward to his return). "Tomás has been away for too long," I said to Luswage, who at that moment did not remind me that she was in France (we were at this gathering; it had taken weeks to plan). No one wanted to ruin the fun we were having, which was conditioned on whether we could pass the night, and passing the night meant doing this thing where we were inside rather than outside what we were doing.

AND ALL THAT time Luswage had been making this gesture with her hand that wasn't *pareis*, and I'd been responding with my own foreign gesture but from the other side of the room, never at table, never when we were with the group. I didn't always know when she was making the gesture. I confused it for other things that didn't warrant response, like when you raised your hand to capture a moth, or free it from a conversation. We talked all the time during the crisis and said nothing and pulled a person toward us. You raised your hand and sent a bodily feeling across the room, through the chest of another then into her book, which, when she read it, brought heat into her body and, the next time you met, diminished the distance between you. Luswage threw her arm straight up and I stopped breathing, waiting to see if it was for me, this fully extended piece of

her body, the fingers spread out, the wrist firm, a slight curve in the palm, the hand exerted as to escape a crowd, now in a deep night waiting. My response was not in my own palm but was in turning my head so to expose the back of my neck, where the hair was raised and the fingers tented. Something gasped; it was a break in the conversation and was our own conversation forming, the words finally meeting and falling forward. If you could see this, if we could, and then silence was sucked out of the room again and voices flooded what we'd been doing on the floor.

THE DESPAIR PUT us in an awkward position in relation to the edge of the city when we walked away from the café, after a day of trying, when we headed out into the night, alone, or in small groups of two; we walked as if “into” the city, toward music tinned by distance, toward voices pushed to the extreme, shouting, disintegrating voices. We walked toward these late-night events, but also walked toward home. This went on for hours (the noise of that party seemed just on the other side of wherever we were). At Luswage’s, we’d walk to the back of her building and climb over the dividing wall, then continue crossing the plain, over Bulcsú, over Krasznalózi, over Tini and Ewa; at Tomás’, we’d climb the grand staircase that led to his tower room and look over the city and try to use our eyes and strain our ears; at Z.’s, we’d hope time would take us,

would sweep us, would take us. We walked up the hill to my house, and the events in the distance signaled us; we were as close as we’d ever been to them and no closer in body. We climbed cit Ramtala, and instead of turning toward my house, we walked past it and past all the other houses on my block, ignoring where the road said curve, ignoring any incline, any decline. The party felt close: it was loud. People must have gone all out on this one—perhaps someone was leaving, or, better, someone had returned.

I BELIEVED WHAT I was seeing was a copy of the crisis rather than the crisis itself, on days that I was alone and without direction, where a book lay discarded beneath a bench and the only word stamped across its surface was "copy," on days when I had arranged to meet the group and couldn't arrive, days where I hadn't written. I'd walk the streets and collect signs of the despair and hang these signs in other parts of the city, near dumpsters, inside public restrooms, wondering if these very signs were not simply items rummaged from other neighborhoods by other people and placed where I'd found them. Was "the crisis" the act of returning things to their original location but forgetting and never knowing where things came from? I'd write down words in my notebook and draw the word "copy" next to them. Was this an original piece

of the crisis? I would ask about the map folding over me, about my destinations seeming to hang in a perpetual, unreachable smog place. Is this the crisis or just a sign of the crisis? Was I devastated, or simply writing the story of this feeling? We tried to discuss it as a group, but it was hard to find your first feelings, that authentic, objective knot of them. We decided that each copy was also an original, perhaps not on the level of the first original but passing on to those looking for it some new category of being.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Renee Gladman is the author of six other books of prose, and one collection of poetry. Since 2005, she has operated Leon Works, an independent press for experimental prose and other thought-projects based in the sentence, making occasional forays into poetry. She teaches in the Literary Arts Department at Brown University.

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My thanks to these writers, as well as to Susan Bernstein for her *Housing Problems*, which is just a very good book for writers interested in ideas of space and the relationship of thought to structure.

And, lastly, were it not for Danielle Vogel's whisperings, these pages would be empty.

DOROTHY, A PUBLISHING PROJECT

1. Renee Gladman *Event Factory*
2. Barbara Comyns *Who Was Changed and Who Was Dead*
3. Renee Gladman *The Ravickians*
4. Manuela Draeger *In the Time of the Blue Ball*
5. Azareen Van der Vliet Oloomi *Fra Keeler*
6. Suzanne Scanlon *Promising Young Women*
7. Renee Gladman *Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge*
8. Amina Cain *Creature*

"*Ana Patova Crosses a Bridge* is the third volume of Renee Gladman's magnificent about the city-state of Ravicka



tures of its absence. It is tempting to read the Ravickian books as an extended allegory—of architecture itself, perhaps, except that architecture is already half-allegorical, its every element raised to prefigure whatever meanings can make their way to them. If any can. In Ravicka, meanings—indeed most contact of any kind—remain in abeyance, building, in absentia, the constitutive negative spaces of the narrative. There is a plot; it lays out zones of sheer ambience. Experiences, of which there are many, unfold as a redolent lingering in the structures of immateriality, the radical realities of the insubstantial. Gladman is a philosopher of architecture, though not that of buildings. Rather, she thinks (and writes) the drifts, partitions, and immobilities of identity, affect, communication, the very possibility of being human. Profound, compelling—haunting, even—the story of Ravicka is astonishingly ours."

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